

AMERICANISMS IN SHAKESPEARE

Words obsolete in England in Use in America.

It is well known that many words and expressions have been preserved, and are yet in common use in America, which have become obsolete in England, or continue to be used there only in certain localities. Such obsolete words and expressions, whenever they occur in Shakespeare, are, of course, understood at first sight by the American reader; while, to make them intelligible to the English reader, they appear to require notes (often fortified with learning) by English editors. For the sake of brevity these may be termed Shakespeare's Americanisms; even though he happened to make use of his meaning explained in America. Of this class of words (1.) there is a familiar and often-quoted example, and it is used twice by Cleopatra. If, as is likely, it was pronounced in Shakespeare's time with the third sound of a, chawer, then the change to chawer would easily follow, and in this form the word is in daily use in farmers' families in most of the Northern States.

(2.) Thills, for the shafts of a wagon; a "hill-horse," for the shaft or wheel-horse; also, fills, with the same meaning. "An you draw backward we'll put you 'll the fills."—Troilus and Cressida, III. 1. "I think I'll now come common customer."—All's Well, V. 3.—Customer properly means one who buys or trades; but in American slang we often hear, "loose customer," "hard customer," "slippery customer," "rough customer," etc.

(3.) Placket, and "placket-hole" are yet somewhat used in America; for I chanced not long ago to hear a lady giving some directions to her maid about the "placket-hole in her dress." My near relationship permitted me to ask an explanation. I was told that it was "the slit or opening in the upper part of the skirt, when it is made separate from the waist or body, for convenience in putting on or off." Three-quarters of a century ago there was much discussion among the editors and commentators of Shakespeare about the true and practical significance of this so frequently used word in Shakespeare. But the fact just stated goes to prove that Stevens (Dr. Johnson's friend) was right, as I suspect her pretty generally was, when in earnest in discussing any mooted Shakespearean question.

(4.) "An envious sliver."—Hamlet, IV. 7. "Silver 'din the moon's eclipse."—Macbeth, IV. 1. "The will sliver and disbranch."—Lear, IV. 2. The word "silver" is yet known and used in America for a small splinter of wood.

(5.) "Afeard" for afraid, fearful, or apprehensive. This word occurs some thirty times in Shakespeare's plays (see Mrs. Clarke's "Concordance"), and is there generally used by persons of high station. At the present day in this country it is often heard among uneducated persons of English descent.

(6.) "Flaw," for a puff of wind or a sudden gust, occurs some half-a-dozen times, and is duly explained each time by one of the best English editors—Singer; yet no cognate word is better understood in this country, nor often used, especially by those living near the seaboard or on our great lakes and rivers.

(7.) "I cannot talk," is a phrase in vulgar use here with old people; and implies a puzzled feeling, or a state of stupid doubt or perplexity. It is explained in this sense by the English editor just named—as, "I know not what to think of it."

(8.) "Base tyke," "Robtail tyke." Tyke evidently meant a cur dog when Shakespeare wrote. I distinctly recollect that in my early years one of our native "help" was wont to call any one who was angry with "you ugly tyke."

(9.) "Slyly finger'd from the lock."—Henry VI, V. 1.—A similar use of the word "deck" for a pack of playing-cards is common at the present day throughout the Western and Southern States.

(10.) "Fetich and wayward was thy infancy."—Richard III, IV. 4.—This word is also to be found in two or three other passages in Shakespeare, and always applied to infancy, as peevish, fretful, and difficult to please. We now hear it used not only of children, but as often applied to grown people.

(11.) "Thou crusty batch of nature."—The word "crusty" is now more used in England than here, to mean cross or ill-tempered. The word "batch" is taken from the baker's art, and is still used as a popular figure of speech in America, generally in a derisive sense, the same as in Shakespeare's text; and, when applied to persons, means that all are equally bad and contemptible.

(12.) "There is not a white in the unruly camp."—Timon, V. 2.—I do not know that we now ever hear a pocket-knife called a "whittle," but the practice of whittling is spoken of as an American characteristic. Hence the proverbial saying applied to a scheming but unsuccessful person—"Always a-whittling, but never making nothing."

(13.) "To quit, in the sense of to make even; also, to quit, in the sense of to make even; constantly used with both these significations, that American readers must wonder a little to see it explained by an English editor, and we therefore infer that it must be going out of use there.

bed, was "to rake up the fire," by covering the burning brands with ashes, to preserve them for lighting a fire the next morning. And servants were liable to reproach for neglect of this duty the same as in England (see Merry Wives of Windsor), as it was not only usual, but made it necessary to run to the neighbors in the morning to fetch live coals."

(14.) "But with a longer tither may we walk."—To explain the meaning of the word "tither" to any American reader would be quite superfluous.

(15.) "Hunts not the trail of polley so sure;" and "On the false trail they cry."—It will be a long while—generations or even centuries, perhaps—before the word "trail" ceases to be used by Americans; but even now it seems that English readers, and especially those who have been to America, are beginning to understand its meaning.

(16.) "We will have, if this fadon run, an autic."—To "fadon" continues to be used in America as a somewhat vulgar synonym for to answer the purpose, to succeed, or to work well.

This probably does not include all of the Americanisms, as I have ventured to term them, to be found in Shakespeare's plays, as I have only just noted such as attracted my attention while occupied with a much more important and agreeable task.

There are not only words, but also things and facts to be found in Shakespeare which have become obsolete and nearly forgotten in England; but which we Americans have preserved and can readily understand at the present day. There are, indeed, many passages in Shakespeare reminding us that, at the time he wrote, England was comparatively a new country as America is at the present day.

Again, "Duncan's" horses are said to have—"Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out, contending 'gainst obedience."—This was doubtless what is known in America by the Mexican word "stampeado"—a sort of panic which, from some cause, generally unknown, seizes upon horses and (more rarely) other domestic animals. It is probably unknown in England at the present day, and only happens in parts of this country comparatively thinly inhabited—as the far West and some Southern districts. The same phenomenon is referred to where "Glendower" says:—"The goats ran from the mountains, and the wild flocks were strangely clamorous to the frightened birds."

Again, "Duncan's" horses:—"Tis said they ate each other." This language, used of horses, sounds like a poetical exaggeration. Yet it happens to be true that horses, when loose and engaged in deadly conflict with each other, only use their teeth, and aim to get at one another's throats, but never use their heels. They kick only when quarrelling, or when they are tied or hampered in some way.

For the confirmation of this last statement I have the authority of the colonel of one of our (regular) cavalry regiments, who was himself brought up on a horse-raising farm in Virginia, and who has since had thirty years' experience in United States frontier service.

"We are here reminded that much of the material for poetry is likely to be destroyed by the changes rapidly going on in the customs and appliances of our domestic and every-day life. Twenty years hence, when cast-iron cooking ranges, and the like, are in the custom, and the brick ovens, this couplet may require explanation:—"And crickets sing at the oven's mouth, As the bilboes of the best iron."—Pericles, Act II, Sc. 1.

For then, probably, no one will hear and remember ever to have heard of evening dresses of such a peculiar and novel character, and for the same reason, it may happen, after steel pens have been in use a century longer, that by some future editor of Byron's works will be needed to explain what he meant by his apostrophe to his "grey goose quill."

The Rothschilds and the Pope. For fifteen centuries the Jews have been cursed by the Pope and persecuted by the Roman Church. There is no more revolting chapter of horrors in history than that of the treatment of the Jews at the hands of the Pontiffs. In all lands where the Roman religion is dominant, the children of Israel have been treated with barbaric rigor—allowed few privileges, and looked upon as a people accursed of God, and set apart by divine ordination to be trampled upon by the Church.

In Rome, at the present day, the Jews are confined to the Ghetto; they are not allowed to set up a shop in any other part of the city, without permit; they can engage only in certain trades, that are compelled to pay enormous taxes into the Papal Treasury; they are subject to a stringent code of laws established by the Pope for their especial government; they are imprisoned and fined for the most trivial offenses. They cannot own any real estate in the city; cannot build, tear down, or remodel any dwelling, or change their place of business, without Papal permission. They are in a state of slavery, with no rights whatever, and entitled to no privileges, and receive none, except upon the gracious condescension of the Pope.

In former times they were unmercifully whipped, and compelled to listen, once a week, to some Christian doctrine in the streets. But time is bringing changes. The Pope is in want of money, and the house of the red shield has money to lend on good security. The house is always ready to accommodate Governments. Italy needs money, she sells her iron system of railroads to the Rothschilds. The Pope wants money, so he sends his Nuncio to the wealthy house of the despised race, offers them security on the property of the Church, the Campagna, and receives ten million dollars to maintain his army and imperial state. That was in 1865.

A year passes, and the Pontifical expenditures are five millions more than the income, and the deficit is made up by the Rothschilds, who take a second security at a higher rate of interest. Another year is passed, and there is a third annual vacuum in the Papal treasury of six millions, which will quite likely be filled by the same house. The Rothschilds can do it with ease. Every time the Pope redeems his loan at the rate he is going? Never! Meanwhile the day is not far distant when these representatives of a persecuted race will have all the available property of the Church in their possession. Surely time works wonders.

RAILROAD LINES.

READING RAILROAD. GREAT TRUNK LINE. FROM PHILADELPHIA TO THE INTERIOR OF PENNSYLVANIA, THE SCHUYLKILL, BERKS, CHESTER, CUMBERLAND, AND WYOMING VALLEYS, AND THE NORTH, NORTHWEST, AND ABE CANADAS.

LEAVING THE COMPANY'S DEPOT, FIFTEENTH AND CALLOWHILL STREETS, PHILADELPHIA, AT THE FOLLOWING HOURS: MORNING ACCOMMODATION. Returning leaves Reading 9:00 P. M., arriving in Philadelphia at 9:10 P. M.

READING ACCOMMODATION. Leaving Reading at 9:00 A. M., stopping at all way stations, arriving at Philadelphia at 9:10 A. M. RETURNING LEAVES PHILADELPHIA AT 9:00 P. M., ARRIVING IN READING AT 9:10 P. M.

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RAILROAD LINES.

PENNSYLVANIA CENTRAL RAILROAD. SUMMER TIME, TAKING EFFECT JUNE 2, 1887. The trains on the Pennsylvania Central Railroad leave the Depot at THIRTY-FIRST and MARKET STREETS, which is reached directly by the cars of the Reading, Union Transfer, and Delaware, Jersey and West Jersey Railroad, N. W. corner of BERKS and AMERICAN STREETS.

ON SUNDAY EXPRESS. On Sunday Express trains leave Front and Market Streets thirty-five minutes before the departure of each train.

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RAILROAD LINES.

NORTH PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD. THE MIDDLE ROUTE.—Shortest and most direct route to Bethlehem, Allentown, Mahanoy, Easton, White Haven, Wilkes-Barre, Mahanoy City, Mountain Lake, and all points in the Lehigh, Muzak, and Wyoming coal regions.

ON SUNDAY EXPRESS. On Sunday Express trains leave Front and Market Streets thirty-five minutes before the departure of each train.

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GOVERNMENT SALES.

GOVERNMENT SALE OF THE MILITARY G. Railroad at Brazos Santiago, Texas.—Office Chief Quartermaster Fifth Military District, New Orleans, La., July 8, 1887.

Sealed Proposals will be received at this office until 12 M., August 10, 1887, for the purchase of all the right, title and interest of the United States in and to the United States Military Railroad from Brazos Santiago to White's Ranch, Texas.

The sale will include the entire track and siding, buildings, water stations, iron tables, bridges, etc., the railroad materials, the supplies pertaining to the road, together with the rolling stock, cars, machinery, and other equipment, as follows:

- 6 1/2 miles Railroad Track.
2 Turn-Tables.
25,000 pounds Railroad Chairs.
9,000 pounds Railroad Iron.
4 Railroad Frogs and Switch Stands.
1 Locomotive and Tender (named "West-ern").
5 Flat Cars.
2 Hand Cars.
2 Push Cars.
588 pounds Car Springs.
2 Crow Feet.
2 Spike Drivers.
1 Track Gauge.
1 Fire Tongs.
1 Railroad Depot Building.
1 Foreman's and Tender (named "West-ern").
1 T. Wharf.
157 pounds American Packing.
55 pounds Jute Packing.
100 lbs. Rubber Hose.
1 Douglas Pump.
2 Water Casks.
1 Feed Pipe.
1 Cistern.
2 Office Desks.
1 Locking Stove.
1 Shovel.
4 Claw Bars.
2 Shackle Bars.
1 Lath.
2 Signal Lanterns.
2 Grind Stones.
1 Padlock.
1 Turning Lath.
8 Spades.
45 Shovels.
1 set of Carpenters' Tools.
2 Jackscrews and Levers.
8 Anvils.
1 Pickaxe.
2 Pinch Bars.
1 Cold Chisel.
1 Blacksmith's Hammers.
8 Sledge Hammers.
15 Hammer Handles.
2 Spike Punches.
100 lbs. of Carpenters' Tools.
6 Blacksmith's Tongs.
2 Vices.
1 Cross-cut Saw.
173 Pick Axes.
34 Pick Axe Handles.
4 Square Brasses.
2 Stamping Blocks.
1 Brass Faucet.
1 Hose Nozzle.

The sale will not include the title to the land, which does not belong to the United States. This road is about ten miles in length, and extends from Brazos Santiago to White's Ranch, on the Rio Grande. From this point connection is made by steamer with Brownsville and Matamoros.

The route is the shortest and best for the immense traffic between the Gulf of Mexico and the interior of Southern Texas and Northern Mexico, and the communication by rail alone can readily be extended to Brownsville. The road already completed saves thirty miles of difficult and tortuous navigation. The road is five feet gauge, good ties, rail, and full equipped.

The property may be inspected on application to Captain C. H. Hoyt, A. Q. M., Brownsville, Texas, and any information desired may be obtained from that officer, or from the Office of the Chief Quartermaster, Fifth Military District, New Orleans, La.

The terms of sale will be that transportation shall be furnished for all Government troops and supplies whenever required, at rates not to exceed those paid by the United States for similar road companies in the Fifth Military District.

The terms of payment accepted will be those considered the most favorable to the Government. Ten per cent. cash, in Government funds, to be paid on acceptance of proposal. The Government reserves the right to reject any or all proposals. Proposals should be indorsed "Proposals for the purchase of Brazos Santiago and Rio Grande Railroad," and addressed to "Brev. Lieut.-Col. A. Q. M. U. S. Army, Chief Quartermaster, Fifth Military District, New Orleans, La."

Brev. Lieut.-Col. and A. Q. M. U. S. Army, 717th. In charge of office.